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STERNE'S LETTERS
TO
HIS FRIENDS
ON
VARIOUS OCCASIONS.

TO WHICH IS ADDED, HIS
HISTORY
OF A
WATCH COAT,
WITH
EXPLANATORY NOTES.

L O N D O N,

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17

STERNE'S LETTERS

THE NEW YORKER



INTRODUCTION.

THE ensuing letters have been some years in the possession of the Editor; their publication was deferred, as he was in daily expectation that time and opportunity would happily have been productive of a larger acquisition; but despairing of any further success, he has ventured to present them to the public, with whom he must sincerely regret the loss we sustain by not retrieving a larger correspondence.

The odious light in which many posthumous publications are deservedly viewed, by the discerning few, would have sunk these letters in oblivion, if they had reflected the least

A

discredit

discredit on the morals or literary merit of an author who so justly deserves the very distinguished attention he has received; but, on the contrary, as they reflect honour on the author in every capacity, and place him in the most pleasing point of view, and as they carry with them evident and convincing marks of originality, he thinks the most incredulous must applaud his undertaking, and be fully satisfied of their authenticity, as he would be always happy to add to, rather than diminish the lustre of literary fame; thinking it almost as criminal to commit a literary as a corporal murder.

Some apology may be thought necessary for subjoining the last letter, as it has already appeared in a small pamphlet about seven years ago; but

as

as it was never attended to for want of being sufficiently known, the editor hopes the public will unite with him in wishing not a dash of his author's pen might be lost; for which reason he could not resist the temptation of preserving it, though it might be of a temporary nature—The following account of it is taken from some anecdotes of Mr. Sterne's life, lately published, and prefixed to the before-mentioned pamphlet, as an advertisement.

—“For some time Mr. Sterne lived, in a retired manner, upon a small curacy in Yorkshire, and, probably, would have remained in the same obscurity, if his lively genius had not displayed itself upon an occasion which secured him a friend,

and paved the way for his promotion — A person who filled a lucrative benefice, was not satisfied with enjoying it during his own life-time, but exerted all his interest to have it intailed on his wife and son after his decease : the gentleman that expected the reversion of this post was Mr. Sterne's friend, who had not, however, sufficient influence to prevent the success of his adversary. — At this time Sterne's satirical pen operated so strongly, that the intended monopolizer informed him, if he would suppress the publication of his sarcasm, he would resign his pretensions to the next candidate."

" The title of this piece, it appears, was to have been, " The History of a good warm Watch Coat, " with

“ with which the present Possessor is
 “ not content to cover his own
 “ shoulders, unless he can cut out of
 “ it, a Petticoat for his Wife, and a
 “ pair of Breeches for his Son.”

Whenever genius is distinguished,
 it will, naturally, excite our attention
 —No man ever claimed a greater right
 to that attention than the author of
 Tristram :—a natural vivacity, united
 with a sentimental delicacy, and a ten-
 derness felt by every susceptible soul,
 deserves commendation : we must rank
 Sterne as one of the most celebrated
 originals. “ He plays with the fan-
 cy, and sometimes, perhaps, too
 wantonly ; but, while he thus de-
 signedly masks his main attack, he
 comes at once upon the heart, refines
 it

it, amends it, softens it, beats down each selfish barrier from about it, and opens every source of pity and benevolence." — This is the true characteristic of our Author, whose poignant wit, and sentimental tenderness, will ever immortalize his memory, while taste exists; and, though I must, unwillingly, subscribe to the opinion of my Author, that "It is not in the power of every one to taste humour, however he may wish it—It is the gift of God," —yet, I trust, the majority of my readers are possessed of that gift, and will heartily rejoice, with me, in the opportunity of preserving these marks of genius, and handing them to posterity.

STERNE'S

STERNE'S LETTERS
TO HIS FRIENDS.

* LETTER I.

Thursday, 11 'Clock at Night.

DEAR SIR,

— 'T WAS for all the world
like a cut across my
finger with a sharp knife—I saw the
blood—gave it a suck—wrapt it up—
and thought no more about it—

* A friend of the Author of the *Divine Le-
gation* suspecting, from report, that Sterne had a
design to make that learned prelate Tristram's
tutor, in the continuation of his work; hinted
his suspicions to him in a letter, to which this
is an answer.

B

— But

—— But there is more goes to the healing of a wound than this comes to: — a wound (unless it is a wound not worth talking of, but by-the-bye mine is) must give you some pain after—nature will take her own way with it—it must ferment—it must digest——

—— The story you told me of Tristram's pretended tutor this morning—My letter, by rights, should have set out with this sentence—and then the simile would not have kept you a moment in suspense—this vile story, I say, though I then saw both how and where it wounded—I felt little from it

at first—or, to speak more honestly (though it ruins my simile), I felt a great deal of pain from it, but affected an air usual on such accidents, of less feeling than I had——

I have now got home to my lodgings, and have been unwrapping this self-same wound of mine, and shaking my head over it this half hour. —What the devil!—Is there no one learned blockhead throughout the many schools of misapplied science in the christian world to make a tabour of for my Tristram?—*Ex quovis ligno non fit.*—Are we so run out of stock, that there is no one lumber-headed, mud-

dle-headed, mortar-headed, pudding-headed chap amongst our doctors? — Is there no one single wight, of much reading and no learning, amongst the many children in my mother's nursery, who bids high for this charge, but I must disable my judgment by choosing a W——? — Vengeance! have I so little concern for the honour of my hero? Am I a wretch so void of sense, so bereft of feeling for the figure he is to make in story, that I should choose a preceptor to rob him of all the immortality I intended him? O my dear friend!

Malice

Malice is ingenious—unless where the excess of it out-wits itself—I have two comforts in this stroke of it;—the first is, that this one is partly of this kind; and secondly, that it is one of the number of those which so unfairly brought poor *Yorick* to his grave.—The report might draw blood of the Author of *Tristram Shandy* — but could not harm such a man as the Author of the *Divine Legation* — God blefs him! (though by-the-bye, and according to the natural course of descents, the blessing should come from him to me.)

Pray have you no interest lateral or collateral to get me introduced to his lordship?

Why do you ask?

My dear Sir, I have no claim to such an honour, but what arises from the honour and respect, which, in the progress of my work, will be shewn the world I owe to so great a man. Whilst I am talking of owing—I wish, dear Sir, that any body would tell you—how much I am indebted to you—I am determined never to do it myself, or say more upon the subject than this, that I am yours,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

L E T-

L E T T E R II.

*From Dr. EUSTACE in America, to the
Rev. Mr. STERNE with a Walking
Stick.*

S I R,

WHEN I assure you that I am
a great admirer of Tristram
Shandy, and have, ever since his intro-
duction into the world, been one of his
most zealous defenders against the re-
peated assaults of prejudice and mis-
apprehension, I hope you will not treat
this unexpected appearance in his com-
pany as an intrusion.

B 4

You

You know it is an observation, as remarkable for its truth as for its antiquity, that a similitude of sentiments is the general parent of friendship.—It cannot be wondered at, that I should conceive an esteem for a person whose nature had most indulgently enabled to frisk and curvet with ease through all these intricacies of sentiments, which from irresistible propensity, she had impelled me to trudge through without merit or distinction.

The only reason that gave rise to this address to you, is my accidentally having met with a piece of true Shandean statuary, I mean according to
vulgar

vulgar opinion, for to such judges both appear equally destitute of regularity or design.—It was made by a very ingenious gentleman of this province, and presented to the late Governor Dobbs, after his death Mrs. D. gave it me: its singularity made many desirous of procuring it, but I had resolved at first not to part with it, till, upon reflection, I thought it would be a very proper and probably not an unacceptable compliment to my favourite author, and in his hands might prove as ample a field for meditation as a button-hole, or a broomstick.

I have the honour to be, &c. &c.

LETTER III.

Mr. STERNE's Answer.

S I R,

London, Feb. 9, 1768.

I THIS moment received your obliging letter and Shandean piece of sculpture along with it, of both which testimonies of your regard I have the justest sense, and return you, dear Sir, my best thanks and acknowledgement. Your walking stick is in no sense more Shandaick than in that of its having more handles than one; the parallel breaks only in this, that in using the stick every one will take the handle
which

which suits his convenience. In Tristram Shandy the handle is taken which suits the passions, their ignorance, or their sensibility. There is so little true feeling in the herd of the world, that I wish I could have got an act of parliament, when the books first appeared, that none but wise men should look into them. It is too much to write books, and find heads to understand them: the world, however, seems to come into a better temper about them, the people of genius here, being to a man on its side; and the reception it has met with in France, Italy, and Germany, has engaged one part of the world

world to give it a second reading. The other, in order to be on the strongest side, has at length agreed to speak well of it too. A few hypocrites and tarts, whose approbation could do it nothing but dishonour, remain unconverted.

I am very proud, Sir, to have had a man like you on my side from the beginning ; but it is not in the power of every one to taste humour, however he may wish it ; it is the gift of God : and, besides, a true feeler always brings half the entertainment along with him ; his own ideas are only called forth by what he reads, and the vibrations with-
in.

in him, intirely correspond with those excited.—'Tis like reading himself—and not the book.

In a week's time I shall be delivered of two volumes of the Sentimental Travels of Mr. Yorick through France and Italy; but, alas! the ship sails three days too soon, and I have but to lament it deprives me of the pleasure of presenting them to you.

Believe me, dear Sir, with great thanks for the honour you have done me, with true esteem,

Your obliged humble servant,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

L E T.

LETTER IV.

To * * * * *

IT is even as you told me, my good friend,—a beckon from an old female acquaintance has led me a dance to * * * * *. It was too great a temptation to be thrown in the way of such a sinner;—so I have bid adieu to Shandy Hall till the beginning of October—which, by-the-bye, is one of the finest months in the year in this part of the kingdom—this is added, by the way, to induce you to return to me at that time: if you cannot, let me know where
you

you are to be the beginning of the following month, and the wheels of my chariot shall roll rapidly towards you.

I have not been quite idle since you left me, but, amidst a thousand impediments, have snatched one volume more for a gouty and a splenetic world. I suppose this will overtake you at the Hot-wells, as you are walking a sentimental foot-pace beside some phthifical nymph of the fountain—if so—protect and cherish her whosoever she be; and tell her, that she has *Tristram Shandy's* wishes for her recovery and happiness.—Had I lived in days of yore, when virtue and sentiment bore a price,

a price, I should have been the most peerless knight of them all!—Some tender-hearted damsel in distress would ever have been my object:—to wipe away the tears from off the cheek of such a friendless fair one, I would go to *Mecca*—and for a friend—to the end of the world—

In this last sentiment my best friend was uppermost in my thoughts!

But wherefore do I think of arms and *Dulcineas*,—when, alas, my spear is grown rusty, and is fit only to be hung in the old family hall, among pistols without *cocks*, and helmets that have lost their vizard.

As

As for my health, which you so kindly inquire after—I cannot brag of it—it is not so well with me this year as it was the last—and I fear I have little on my side but laughter and good spirits! These have stood me in great stead for twenty years past, how long they may be able to keep the field, and prolong the combat—for at best it is but prolonging a contest which must at last end in their defeat—I know not!—Nevertheless, for the days that are past, as well as those which are to come, I will eat my bread in peace: and be it but bread and water, and I have such

C

a friend

a friend as you, I will find a way,
some how or other, to make merry
over it.

Adieu,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

LETTER

LETTER V.

To * * * * *

—THE first time I have dipped my pen into the ink-horn is to write to you—and to thank you most sincerely for your kind epistle!—will this be a sufficient apology for my letting it lay ten days upon the table without answering it?—I trust it will;—I am sure my own feelings tell me so—because I feel it to be impossible for me to do any thing that is ungracious towards you. It is not every hour, or day, or week,

in a man's life, that is a fit season for the duties of friendship:—sentiment is not always at hand—folly and pride, and what is called business, oftentimes keep it at a distance: and without sentiment, what is friendship?—a name!—a shadow!—But, to prevent a misapplication of all this (though why should I fear it from so kind and gentle a spirit as yours?) you must know, that by the carelessness of my curate, or his wife, or his maid, or some one within his gates, the parsonage-house at ——— was, about a fortnight ago burnt to the ground, with the furniture which belonged to me, and a pretty

pretty good collection of books—the loss about three hundred and fifty pounds. — The poor man, with his wife, took the wings of the next morning and fled away. — This has given me real vexation—for so much was my pity and esteem for him, that as soon as I heard of the disaster, I sent to desire he would come and take his abode with me, 'till another habitation was ready to receive him—but he was gone; and, as I am told, for fear of my persecution—Heavens! how little did he know me, to suppose that I was among the number of those wretches, who heap misfortune on mis-

fortune — and when the load is almost insupportable still add to the weight. — God, who reads my heart, knows it to be true, that I wish rather to share than to increase the burden of the miserable — to dry up instead of adding a single drop to the stream of sorrow. — As to the dirty trash of this world, I regard it not; the loss of it does not cost me a sigh — for, after all, I may say with the Spanish Captain, that I am as good a gentleman as the King, only not quite so rich. — But to the point —

Shall I expect you here this summer? I much wish that you may make

it convenient to gratify me in a visit for a few weeks. I will give you a roast fowl for your dinner, and a clean table-cloth every day; and tell you a story by way of desert.—In the heat of the day we will sit in the shade; and in the evening the fairest of all the milk-maids, who pass by my gate, shall weave a garland for you.

If I should be so unfortunate as not to see you here, do, contrive to meet me the beginning of October—I shall stay here about a fortnight, and then seek a kindlier climate.—This plaguy cough of mine seems to gain

C 4 ground,

ground, and will bring me at last to my grave, in spite of all I can do; but while I have strength to run away from it I will!—I have been wrestling with it for these twenty years past; and what with laughter and good spirits have prevented its giving me a fall; but my antagonist presses me closer than ever, and I have nothing left on my side but another journey abroad! — apropos, — are you for a scheme of that sort? — If not — perhaps you will accompany me as far as Dover, that we may laugh together upon the beach, to put Neptune in good

good humour, before I embark. —
God blefs you—

Adieu,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

LETTER

LETTER VI.

To * * * * *

— I Have been much concerned at your overthrow; but our roads are ill contrived for the airy vehicles now in fashion. May it be the last fall you ever meet with in this world!—but this reflection costs me a deep sigh—and I fear, my friend, you will get over it no cheaper—Many, many are the ups and downs of life, and fortune must be uncommonly gracious to that mortal who does not experience a great variety of them:—
 though

though perhaps to these may be owing as much of our pleasures as our pains: there are scenes of delight in the vale as well as the mountain; and the inequalities of nature may not be less necessary to please the eye—than the varieties of life to improve the heart. At best we are but a short-sighted race of beings, with just light enough to discern our way—to do that is our duty, and should be our care; when a man has done this, he is safe, the rest is of little consequence—

Cover his head with a turf or a stone,

It is all one, it is all one!

—I visited my abbey, as usual, every evening—amid the mouldering ruins of ancient greatness I take my solitary walk; far removed from the noise and bustle of a malicious world, I can cherish the fond remembrance of my *Cordelia*—*Cordelia*, thou wert kind, gentle, andauteous! thy beauties, rather let me say thy misfortunes, first raised the flame of tender affection in my breast!—But thy beauties, and thy misfortunes, are passed away together; and all that charmed mankind, and delighted me, become a clod of the valley!—Here, my *Cordelia*, I will weed clean thy grave—I will stretch myself

myself upon it—I will wet it with tears—and the traveller shall not turn aside to observe me.—

But whither am I led? Do, my kind friend, excuse the wanderings of my pen; it governs me, I govern not it—Farewel; and receive the warmest affection of,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

To * * * * *

— I Fear, that ere this, you may have oftentimes accused me of negligence, in not answering your last letters; but you addressed them to me in London, and I was dying in the country.—I have been more forely afflicted this last time than I ever was before: had I followed the advice of the faculty, it had been over with me; and, contrary to their opinion, I ventured to order myself a stout bleeding;—this, in all probability, saved me; for

for how long, God only knows!—
 I am still weak, and can hardly make
 myself heard across my table. — My
 spirits, the best friends I ever had
 in this world, stuck close by me in
 this last conflict; by their kind assist-
 ance I have been able to bear the
 heavy load of life, and walk so mer-
 rily along the wilderness of this world:
 — thanks to them I have been able
 to whistle and sing in its most un-
 cheery paths!—As it has pleased hea-
 ven to let them accompany me thus
 far on my journey, I hope and trust
 they will not be suffered to leave me
 now that I am almost at the end of
 it.—

it.—I know and feel (my friend) that this last sentiment will give you pain! —this, believe me, is most foreign to my wishes; but I always write from my heart—and supposing it to be my practice to cheat the world, I have ever considered the character of a friend too respectable to make the sport of an idle imagination. To deceive is a base trade at best;—but to deceive those we love and value, is a folly so totally inexcusable, that I defy all the arts of sophistry to frame an argument in its favour. — When I open my heart—I shew all its follies—its caprices—its wantonness—its virtues

tues are all exposed to view; and though by this means I lay myself open to the illiberal and the ill-natured, who are ever ready to seize the opportunity of gratifying their dirty passions;—and withal are so numerous, that hypocrisy, with respect to them, is accounted a virtue.—*But I shew all!*—this may be imprudent—and I am told by some sentimental prudes—that it is indecent;—if so, let them put their fans before their faces, or walk on the other side of the way.—Disguise is the fashion; and the man who does not use it, is called a Libertine:—for my part—I hate a masque, and will never

D

I wear

wear one! I am not ashamed of my
 failings, while I feel that I have some
 little stock of virtue to counterbalance
 them.—The man who hides nothing,
 who varnishes nothing, when applause,
 when honour comes, and come it must
 to such, finds no busy something in his
 breast that gives the lie to it.—'Tis his
 own,—and his heart will answer it.—
 Of all sycophants, scourge me those
 who flatter themselves! — He who
 speaks peace to himself, when there is
 no peace, is acting a part he cannot
 long support — the scene closes — the
 curtain drops—and he is himself again.
 The follies, the errors of mankind, I
 I sincerely

sincerely forgive, as I hope to be forgiven ; — and when a man is mounted on his hobby-horse, let him amble or trot, or gallop, so he will be quiet, and not let his heart do mischief — God speed him ! — And if I feel an inclination to put on my fool's cap, and jingle the bells for two or three hours of the four-and-twenty — or the whole twenty-four hours together — what is that to any one ? — O, Sir, you will be called trifling, foolish, &c. &c. — with all my heart ! — Pray, good folks, fall on — never spare ! — Fair ladies, have you got your bellies full ? — if so, much good may it do you ! — But, Sir, we

must prove you to be a rogue, a rascal, an hypocrite. — Alas ! I have nothing to give you but my fool's cap and my hobby-horse—if they are not sufficient, I must beg leave to recommend you to that pale-faced, solemn, stiff-starched figure who is this moment entering that church : fall upon him !—and for once in your lives, perhaps, you may hit the mark.

I fear, my good friend, you will begin to think, that however my speaking faculties are obstructed, that one of writing still remains free and and large—but here is the grief—It is but writing !—My pen is a leaden one,
and

and it is with some difficulty I trail it
on to assure you of my being most
cordially,

Yours,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

LETTER VIII.

To * * * * *

I Have not been a furlong from Shandy-hall since I wrote to you last—but why is my pen so perverse? I have been to *****, and my errand was of so peculiar a nature, that I must give you an account of it.—You will scarce believe me, when I tell you, it was to out-juggle a juggling attorney; to put craft, and all its power, to defiance; and to obtain justice from one—who has a heart foul enough to take advantage of the mistakes of honest

nest

nest simplicity, and who has raised a considerable fortune by artifice and injustice. However, I gained my point! —It was a star and garter to me! —the matter was as follows:—

“ A poor man, the father of my
 “ Vestal, having, by the sweat of his
 “ brow, during a course of many la-
 “ borious years, saved a small sum of
 “ money, applied to this scribe to put
 “ it out to use for him: this was
 “ done, and a bond given for the
 “ money. — The honest man, having
 “ no place in his cottage which he
 “ thought sufficiently secure, put it
 “ in a hole in the thatch, which had

“ served instead of a strong box, to
 “ keep his money.—In this situation
 “ the bond remained till the time of
 “ receiving his interest drew nigh.—
 “ But, alas!—the rain which had done
 “ no mischief to his gold, had found
 “ out his paper-security, and had rot-
 “ ted it to pieces!”—It would be a
 difficult matter to paint the distress of
 the old countryman upon this dis-
 covery ;—he came to me weeping, and
 begging my advice and assistance!—
 it cut me to the heart!

Frame to yourself the picture of a
 man upwards of sixty years of age—
 who having with much penury and
 more

more toil, with the addition of a small legacy, scraped together about four-score pounds to support him in the infirmities of old age, and to be a little portion for his child when he should be dead and gone — lost his little hoard at once; and to aggravate his misfortune, through his own neglect and incaution. — “ If I was young,
 “ Sir, (said he) my affliction would
 “ have been light—and I might have
 “ obtained it again!—but I have lost
 “ my comfort when I most wanted it!
 “ —My staff is taken from me when
 “ I cannot go alone; and I have no-
 “ thing to expect, in future life, but
 “ the

“ the unwilling charity of a Parish-
 “ Officer.”—Never, in my whole life,
 did I wish to be rich, with so good a
 grace, as at this time !—What a luxury
 it would have been to have said, to
 this afflicted fellow-creature,—“ There
 “ is thy money—go thy ways—and
 “ be at peace.”—But, alas ! the Shan-
 dy family were never much encum-
 bered with money ; and I (the poorest
 of them all) could only assist him with
 good counsel :—but I did not stop
 here.—I went myself with him to
 * * * * *, where by persuasion,
 threats, and some art, which (by-the-
 bye) in such a cause, and with such

an

an opponent, was very justifiable —
 I sent my poor client back to his home,
 with his comfort and his bond restored
 to him.—Bravo!—Bravo!—

If a man has a right to be proud of
 any thing, —it is of a good action,
 done as it ought to be, without any
 base interest lurking at the bottom of
 it.—Adieu—Adieu—

LAWRENCE STERNE.

L E T T E R

LETTER IX.

To Mrs. V——.

OF the two bad cassocs, fair lady, which I am worth in the world, I would this moment freely give the latter of them to find out by what irresistible force of magic it is, that I am influenced to write a letter to you upon so short an acquaintance.—Short—did I say?—I unsay it again—I have been acquainted with Mrs. V—— this long and many a day: for, surely, the most penetrating of her sex need not be told, that intercourses of this kind

are

are not to be dated by hours, days, or months—but by the slow or rapid progress of our intimacies, which are measured only by the degrees of penetration by which we discover characters at once—or by the openness and frankness of heart which lets the observer into it without the pains of reflection: either of these spares us what a short life could ill afford—and that is the long and unconfessionable time in forming connections, which had much better be spent in tasting the sweets of them. — Now of this frame and contexture is the fair Mrs. V——; her character is to be read at once — I saw
it

it before I had walked twenty paces beside her—I believe, in my conscience, dear lady, if truth was known, *that you have no inside at all.*

That you are graceful, elegant, and desirable, &c. &c. — every common beholder who can stare at you, as a Dutch boor does at the Queen of Sheba,—can easily find out — but that you are sensible, gentle and tender, and from one end to the other of you full of the sweetest tones and modulations, requires a deeper research.—You are a system of harmonic vibrations — the softest and best attuned of all instruments. — Lord ! I would give away
my

my other cassock to touch you—But in giving my last rag of priesthood for that pleasure, I should be left naked—to say nothing of being quite *disordered*—so divine a hand as your's would presently put me into *orders* again—but if you suppose this would leave me as you found me, believe me, dear Mrs. V——, you are much mistaken.—All this being duly put together, pray, dear lady, let me ask you, What business you had to come here from——? or, to speak more to the purpose, what business have you to return back again? — The deuce take you with your musical and other powers;

powers ; could nothing serve you, but you must turn *Tristram Shandy's* head, as if it was not turned enough already—as for your turning my heart—I forgive you, as you have been so good as to turn it towards so excellent and heavenly an object.—

Now, dear Mrs. V——, if you can help it, do not think of *yourself*—

But believe me to be,

With the highest esteem

For your character and self,

Your's,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

LETTER

LETTER X.

To, * * * * *

I Snatch half an hour, while my dinner is getting ready, to tell you I am thus far on my way to Shandy-hall :—two more stages and I shall be at the end of a tedious journey.—Report, for the fourth time, has numbered me with the dead ;—and it was generally believed in this part of the world, that my bones were laid in classic ground.—This I do not much

E

wonder

wonder at—for, to make the best of it, my constitution is but a scurvy one, and to keep the machine a going a little longer, has been the only motive for my running away from my friends and my country so much as I have done of late;—though weak as it is, it has some how or other weathered more storms than many a stouter one has been able to do:—could I but transform myself into a bird of passage, and go and come with the summer—I think I should give the lie to a few more reports of this nature—before I am called in good earnest to make a
report

report of myself and all my actions to the Being who made me.

The book of engravings, which I left with you, I must recommend to your care for a few weeks longer : — nay, — if you think they are worthy your acceptance — keep them for ever ! — for to tell you the truth, I have now no occasion for them : — this is rather an ungracious way of making an offering, but you will excuse me when I tell you, — that the dear young lady, at whose feet I intended to lay them down, — and for whose sake I had preserved them with so much care, is gone

to that country from whence no one returns. — Genius, — wit, — beauty, — goodness, — all; all were united in her! — Every virtue, — every grace! — I could write forever on such a theme — but I must have done.

Surely the pleasures which arise from contemplating such characters, — embracing the urn which contains their ashes, — and shedding the tears of friendship over it — are far, far superior to the highest joys of sense, — or sensuality.

If you do not like the last word, — I pray you be so kind as to scratch it out; —

out; — for that is a liberty I have never yet ventured to take myself with any thing I write.

Adieu,—adieu—

Yours most truly,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

E 3

LET.

LETTER XI.

To * * * * *

— **I** Beheld her tender look—her
 pathetic eye petrified my fluids
 —the liquid desolation drowned those
 once-bright orbs—the late sympathetic
 features, so pleasing in their harmony,
 are now blasted—withered—and are
 dead;—her charms are dwindled into a
 melancholy which demands my pity.—
 Yes—my friend—our once sprightly
 and vivacious Harriot is that very ob-
 ject that must thrill your soul.— How
 abandoned!

abandoned is that heart which bulges the tear of innocence, and is the cause — the fatal cause of overwhelming the spotless soul and plunging the yet-untainted mind into a sea of sorrow and repentance—Though born to protect the fair, does not man act the part of a Demon? — first alluring by his temptations, and then triumphing in his victory — when villany gets the ascendancy it seldom leaves the wretch till it has thoroughly polluted him

—— T * * * * *, once the joyous companion of our juvenile extravagances, by a deep-laid scheme, so far ingratiated himself into the good

— now

graces of the old man — that even he, with all his penetration and experience, (of which old folks generally pique themselves) could not perceive his drift, and, like the goodness of his own heart, believed him honourable : — had I known his pretensions — I would have flown on the wings of friendship — of regard — of affection — and rescued the lovely innocent from the hands of the spoiler : — be not alarmed at my declaration — I have been long bound to her in the reciprocal bonds of affection ; — but it is of a more delicate stamp, than the gross materials nature has planted in us for procreation —

tion—I hope ever to retain the idea of innocence and love her still:—I would love the whole sex were they equally deserving.

——— taking her by the hand—the other thrown round her waist—after an intimacy allowing such freedoms—with a look deceitfully pleasing, the villain poured out a torrent of protestations—and though oaths are sacred—swore, with all the fortitude of a conscientious man—the depth of his love—the height of his esteem—the strength of his attachment;—by these, and other artful means to answer his abandoned pur-

pose (for which you know he is but too well qualified) — gained on the open inexperienced heart of the generous Harriot, and robbed her of her brightest jewel. — Oh, England! where are your senators? — where are your laws? — Ye Heavens! where rests your deadly thunder? — why are your bolts restrained from overwhelming with vengeance this vile seducer. — I, — my friend, — I, was the minister sent by justice to revenge her wrongs — revenge — I disclaim it — to redress her wrongs. — The news of affliction flies — I heard it, and posted to * * * *, where forgetting my character — this is the file
of

of the enthusiast — it most became my character — I saw him in his retreat — I flew out of the chaise — caught him by the collar — and in a tumult of passion — demanded : — sure, if anger is excusable, it must be when it is exerted by a detestation of vice. — I demanded him to restore : — alas ! — what was not in his power to return. — Vengeance ! — and shall these vermin — these spoilers of the fair — these murderers of the mind — lurk and creep about in dens, secure to themselves and pillage all around them ? — Distracted with my rage — I charged him with his crime — exploded his baseness — condemned

this

his villany—while coward guilt sat on his sullen brow, and, like a criminal conscious of his deed, tremblingly pronounced his fear. — He hoped means might be found for a sufficient atonement—offered a tender of his hand as a satisfaction, and a life devoted to her service as a recompence for his error.— His humiliation struck me—'twas the only means he could have contrived to assuage my anger. — I hesitated — paused—thought—and still must think on so important a concern:—assist me — I am half afraid of trusting my Harriot in the hands of a man, whose character I too well know to be the antipodes

podes of Harriot's. — He all fire and dissipation; — she all meekness and sentiment! — nor can I think there is any hopes of reformation; — the offer proceeds more from surprise or fear, than justice and sincerity. — The world — the world will exclaim, and my Harriot be a cast-off from society — Let her — I had rather see her thus, than miserably linked for life to a lump of vice. — She shall retire to some corner of the world, and there weep out the remainder of her days in sorrow — forgetting the wretch who has abused her confidence, but ever remembering the friend who consoles her in retirement. — You, my dear

dear Charles, shall bear a part with me in the delightful task of whispering "Peace to those who are in trouble, and healing the broken in spirit."

Adieu,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

LETTER

LETTER XII.

To * * * * *

SIR!

I Feel the weight of obligation which your friendship has laid upon me, and if it should never be in my power to make you a recompence, I hope you will be recompensed at the "Resurrection of the just."—I hope, Sir, we shall both be found in that catalogue;—and we are encouraged to hope, by the example of Abraham's faith even "Against hope."—I think
there

there is, at least, as much probability of our reaching, and rejoicing in the "Haven where we would be," as there was of the old Patriarch's having a child by his old wife.—There is not any person living or dead, whom I have so strong a desire to see and converse with as yourself;—indeed I have no inclination to visit, or say a syllable to, but a few persons in this lower vale of vanity and tears besides you;—but I often derive a peculiar satisfaction in conversing with the ancient and modern dead,—who yet live and speak excellently in their works.—My neighbours think *often alone*,—and yet

at

at such times I am in company with more than five hundred mutes—each of whom, at my pleasure, communicates his ideas to me by dumb signs—quite as intelligibly as any person living can do by *uttering* of words.—They always keep the distance from me which I direct,—and, with a motion of my hand, I can bring them as near to me as I please.—I lay hands on fifty of them sometimes in an evening, and handle them as I like :—they never complain of ill-usage,—and when dismissed from my presence,—though ever so abruptly—take no offence. Such convenience is not to be enjoy-

enjoyment

F

ed—

ed — nor such liberty to be taken —
 with the living : — we are bound — in
 point of good manners to admit all
 our pretended friends when they knock
 for an entrance, and dispense with all
 the nonsense or impertinence which they
 broach 'till they think proper to with-
 draw : nor can we take the liberty of
 humbly and decently opposing their
 sentiments without exciting their dis-
 gust, and being in danger of their
 splenetic representation after they have
 left us.

I am weary of talking to the *many*,
 — who though quick of hearing — are
 so “Slow of heart to believe” — pro-
 positions

positions which are next to self-evident;—you and I were not cast in *one mould*,—corporal comparison will attest it,—and yet we are fashioned so much alike, that we may pass for twins:—were it possible to take an inventory of all our sentiments and feelings—just and unjust—holy and impure—there would appear as little difference between them as there is between instinct and reason,—or—wit and madness, the barriers which separate these—like the real essence of bodies—escape the piercing eye of metaphysicks, and cannot be pointed out more clearly than geometers define

a strait line, which is said to have length without breadth.—O ye learned anatomical aggregates, who pretend to instruct other aggregates! be as candid as the sage whom ye pretend to revere—and tell them, that all you know is, that you know nothing!

— — — I have a *mort* to communicate to you on different subjects—my mountain will be in labour 'till I see you—and then—what then?—why you must expect to see it bring forth—a mouse.—I therefore beseech you to have a watchful eye to the cats;—but it is said that mice were designed to be killed by cats.—Cats
to

to be worried by dogs, &c. &c.—
 This may be true—and I think I am
 made to be killed by my cough,—
 which is a perpetual plague to me;
 what, in the name of sound lungs,
 has my cough to do with you—or—
 you with my cough?

I am, Sir, with the most

Perfect Affection and esteem,

Your humble Servant,

LAWRENCE STERNE.

LETTER

LETTER XIII.

To * * * * *

SIR,

IN my last, for want of something better to write about, I told you what a world of fending and proving we have had of late, in this little * village of ours, about an old cast-off pair of black plush-breeches, which † *John*, our parish clerk, about ten years ago, it seems, had made a promise of to one *Trim* ‡, who is our sex-

* York. † Dr. Fount—n, Dean of York.
‡ Dr T—ph—m

ton and dog-whipper. — To this you write me word, that you have had more than either one or two occasions to know a good deal of the shifty behaviour of the said master *Trim* — and that you are astonished, nor can you for your soul conceive, how so worthless a fellow, and so worthless a thing into the bargain, could become the occasion of so much racket as I have represented. —

Now, though you do not say expressly, you could wish to hear any more about it, yet I see plainly enough I have raised your curiosity, and therefore, from the same motive that I slightly menti-

oned it at all in my last letter, I will in this give you a full and very circumstantial account of the whole affair.

But, before I begin, I must first set you right in one very material point, in which I have misled you, as to the true cause of all this uproar amongst us — which does not take its rise, as I then told you, from the affair of the breeches, but, on the contrary, the whole affair of the breeches has taken its rise from it. — To understand which you must know, that the first beginning of the squabble was not between *John* the parish clerk and *Trim* the sexton, but betwixt the parson.

* parson of the parish and the said master *Trim*, about an old *watch-coat* that had hung up many years in the church, which *Trim* had set his heart upon; and nothing would serve *Trim* but he must take it home in order to have it converted into a *warm under-petticoat* for his wife, and a *jerkin* for himself against winter; which, in a plaintive tone, he most humbly begged his reverence would consent to.

I need not tell you, Sir, who have so often felt it, that a principle of strong compassion transports a generous mind sometimes beyond what is strictly right;

* Apb. H—tt—n

—the

—the parson was within an ace of being an honourable example of this very crime—for no sooner did the distinct words—*petticoat—poor wife—warm—winter*, strike upon his ear—but his heart warmed—and before *Trim* had well got to the end of his petition (being a gentleman of a frank open temper) he told him he was welcome to it with all his heart and soul.—But, *Trim*, says he, as you see I am but just got down to my living, and am an utter stranger to all parish matters, knowing nothing about this old watch-coat you beg of me, having never seen it in my life, and therefore cannot be a judge whether

'tis

'tis fit for such a purpose, or, if it is, in truth know not whether 'tis mine to bestow upon you or not — you must have a week or ten days patience, till I can make some inquiries about it — and, if I find it is in my power, I tell you again, man, your wife is heartily welcome to an under-petticoat out of it, and you to a jerkin, was the thing as good again as you represent it.

It is necessary to inform you, Sir, in this place, that the parson was earnestly bent to serve *Trim* in this affair, not only from the motive of generosity, which I have justly ascribed to him, but likewise from another motive, and that

was

was by making some sort of recompence for a multitude of small services which *Trim* had occasionally done, and indeed was continually doing (as he was much about the house) when his own man was out of the way.—For all these reasons together, I say, the parson of the parish intended to serve *Trim* in this matter to the utmost of his power. All that was wanting, was previously to inquire if any one had a *claim* to it, or whether, as it had time immemorial hung up in the church, the taking it down might not raise a clamour in the parish. These inquiries were the things that *Trim* dreaded in his heart—he knew
very

very well, that, if the parson should but say one word to the churchwardens about it, there would be an end of the whole affair. For this, and some other reasons not necessary to be told you at present, *Trim* was for allowing no time in this matter — but on the contrary doubled his diligence and importunity at the vicarage-house — plagued the whole family to death — prest his suit morning, noon, and night, and, to shorten my story, teased the poor gentleman, who was but in an ill state of health, almost out of his life about it.

You

You will not wonder when I tell you, that all this hurry and precipitation, on the side of master *Trim*, produced its natural effect on the side of the parson, and that was a suspicion that all was not right at the bottom.

He was one evening sitting alone in his study, weighing and turning this doubt every way in his mind, and after an hour and a half's serious deliberation upon the affair, and running over *Trim's* behaviour throughout—he was just saying to himself—*it must be so*—when a sudden rap at the door put an end to his soliloquy, and in a few minutes to his doubts too; for a labourer

bourer in the town, who deemed himself past his fifty-second year, had been returned by the constables in the militia list — and he had come with a groat in his hand to search the parish-register for his age. The parson bid the poor fellow put the groat into his pocket, and go into the kitchen—then shutting the study door, and taking down the parish register—*who knows,* says he, *but I may find something here about this selfsame watch-coat?* He had scarce unclasped the book, in saying this, when he popped on the very thing he wanted, fairly wrote in the first page, pasted to the inside of one of the covers, whereon

whereon was a memorandum about the very thing in question in these exprefs words—*Memorandum.* “ The
 “ great watch-coat was purchafed and
 “ given, above two hundred years ago,
 “ by the lord of the manor to this pa-
 “ rish church, to the fole ufe and be-
 “ hoof of the poor sexton thereof, and
 “ their fucceffors for ever, to be worn
 “ by them refpectively in winterly cold
 “ nights in ringing *complines*, *paſſing*
 “ *bells*, &c. which the faid lord of the
 “ manor had done in piety to keep the
 “ poor wretches warm, and for the
 “ good of his own foul, for which
 “ they were directed to pray, &c.”

Just beaven! said the parson to himself looking upwards, *what an escape have I had! give this for an underpetticoat to Trim's wife! I would not have consented to such a desecration to be Primate of all England—nay, I would not have disturbed a single button of it for all my tithes.*

Scarce were the words out of his mouth, when in pops *Trim* with the whole subject of the exclamation under both his arms—I say under both his arms—for he had actually got it ript and cut out ready, his own jerkin under one arm, and the petticoat under the other, in order to carry to the tay-

lor to be made up, and had just stepped in, in high spirits, to show the parson how cleverly it had held out.

There are now many good families subsisting in the world, but which I have neither time to recollect or look for, which would give you a strong conception of the astonishment and honest indignation which this unexpected stroke of *Trim's* impudence impressed upon the parson's looks—let it suffice to say, that it exceeded all fair description—as well as all power of proper resentment—except this, that *Trim* was ordered, in a stern voice, to lay the bundles down upon the table—

to

to go about his business, and wait upon him, at his peril, the next morning at eleven precisely.—Against this hour, like a wise man, the parson had sent to desire *John* the parish clerk, who bore an exceeding good character as a man of truth, and who, having moreover a pretty freehold of about eighteen pounds a year in the township, was a leading man in it; and, upon the whole, was such a one, of whom it might be said, that he rather did honour to his office than that his office did honour to him.—him he sends for with the churchwardens, and one of the sidersmen, a grave, knowing old

man, to be present—for, as *Trim* had withheld the whole truth from the parson touching the watch-coat, he thought it probable he would as certainly do the same thing to others. Tho' this, I said, was wise, the trouble of the precaution might have been spared—because the parson's character was unblemished—and he had ever been held by the world in the estimation of a man of honour and integrity. —*Trim's* character on the contrary was as well known, if not in the world at least in all the parish, to be that of a little, dirty, pimping, pettyfogging, ambidextrous fellow—who neither

cared what he did or said of any, provided he could get a penny by it. This might, I said, have made any precaution needless—but you must know, as the parson had in a manner but just got down to his living, he dreaded the consequences of the least ill impression on his first entrance among his parishioners, which would have disabled him from doing them the good he wished—so that out of regard to his flock, more than the necessary care due to himself—he was resolved not to lie at the mercy of what resentment might vent, or malice lend an ear to.—

Accordingly the whole matter was rehearsed, from first to last, by the parson, in the manner I've told you, in the hearing of *John* the parish clerk, and in the presence of *Trim*.

Trim had little to say for himself, except "that the parson had absolutely promised to befriend him and his wife in the affair to the utmost of his power; that the watch-coat was certainly in his power, and that he might still give it him if he pleased."

To this the parson's reply was short, but strong, "That nothing was in his power to do but what he could do *honestly* — that, in giving the coat to him

him and his wife, he should do a manifest wrong to the *next* sexton, the great watch-coat being the most comfortable part of the place—that he should moreover injure the right of his own successor, who would be just so much a worse patron as the worth of the coat amounted to, and, in a word, he declared, that his whole intent in promising that coat was charity to *Trim*, but *wrong* to no man—that was a reserve, he said, made in all cases of this kind: and he declared solemnly, *in verbo sacerdotis*, that this was his meaning, and was so understood by *Trim* himself.”

With the weight of this truth, and the great good sense and strong reason which accompanied all the parson said on the subject—poor *Trim* was driven to his last shift—and begged he might be suffered to plead his right and title to the watch-coat, if not by *promise*, at least by *servitude*—it was well known how much he was intitled to it upon these scores : that he had black'd the parson's shoes without count, and greased his boots above fifty times—that he had run for eggs in the town upon all occasions—whetted the knives at all hours—caught his horse, and rubbed him down—that, for his wife,

she

she had been ready upon all occasions
 to char for them; and neither he nor
 she, to the best of his remembrance,
 ever took a farthing, or any thing be-
 yond a mug of ale.—To this account
 of his services, he begged leave to add
 those of his wishes, which, he said,
 had been equally great—he affirmed,
 and was ready he said, to make it ap-
 pear, by a number of witnesses, “he
 had drank his reverence’s health a
 thousand times (by the bye he did not
 add out of the parson’s own ale)—
 that he had not only drank his health
 but wished it, and never came to the
 house but asked his man kindly how
 he

he did ; that in particular, about half a year ago, when his reverence cut his finger in paring an apple, he went half a mile to ask a cunning woman what was good to staunch blood, and actually returned with a cobweb in his breeches pocket. Nay, says *Trim*, it was not a fortnight ago, when your reverence took that strong purge, that I went to the far end of the whole town to borrow you a clostool—and came back, as the neighbours who flouted me will all bear witness, with the pan upon my head, and never thought it too much." *Trim* concluded this pathetic remonstrance with

saying

saying “ he hoped his reverence’s heart would not suffer him to requite so many faithful services by so unkind a return:— that if it was so, as he was the first, so he hoped he should be the last example of a man of his condition so treated.” This plan of *Trim*’s defence, which *Trim* had put himself upon, could admit of no other reply than general smile.—Upon the whole, let me inform you, that all that could be said *pro* and *con*, on both sides, being fairly heard, it was plain that *Trim* in every part of this affair had behaved very ill—and one thing, which was never expected to be known of him,

hap-

happened in the course of this debate to come out against him, namely, that he had gone and told the parson, before he had ever set foot in his parish, that *John* his parish clerk—his churchwardens, and some of the heads of the parish, were a parcel of scoundrels:—Upon the upshot, *Frim* was kick'd out of doors, and told at his peril never to come there again.—

At first, *Frim* huff'd and bounced most terribly—swore he would get a warrant—that nothing would serve him but he would call a bye-law, and tell the whole parish how the parson had misused him, but cooling of that, as
fear-

fearing the parson might possibly bind him over to his good behaviour, and, for aught he knew, might send him to the house of correction, he lets the parson alone, and to revenge himself falls foul upon the clerk, who had no more to do in the quarrel than you or I—rips up the promise of the old—cast—pair of black—plush—breeches; and raises an uproar in the town about it, notwithstanding it had slept ten years—but all this, you must know, is looked upon in no other light but as an artful stroke of generalship in *Trim* to raise a dust, and cover himself un-

der

der the disgraceful chastisement he has undergone.—

If your curiosity is not yet satisfied—
—I will now proceed to relate the
battle of the breeches in the same exact
manner I have done that of the watch-
coat.—

Be it known then, that about ten
years ago, when *John* was appointed
parish-clerk of this church, this said
Trim took no small pains to get into
John's good graces, in order, as it af-
terwards appeared, to coax a promise
out of him of a pair of breeches, which
John had then by him, of black plush,
not much the worse for wearing—

Trim

Trim only begged, for God's sake, to have them bestowed upon him when *John* should think fit to cast them.—

Trim was one of those kind of men who loved a bit of finery in his heart, and would rather have a tatter'd rag of a better body's than the best plain whole thing his wife could spin him.

John, who was naturally unsuspicious, made no more difficulty of promising the breeches than the parson had done in promising the great coat; and indeed with something less reserve—because the breeches were *John's* own, and he could give them, without wrong, to whom he thought fit.

It

It happened, I was going to say unluckily, but I should rather say most luckily, for *Trim*, for he was the only gainer by it, that a quarrel, about some six or eight weeks after this, broke out betwixt *the late* parson of the parish and *John* the clerk. Somebody (and it was thought to be nobody but *Trim*) had put it into the parson's head, "that *John's* desk in the church was at the least four inches higher than it should be—that the thing gave offence, and was indecorous, inasmuch as it approached too near upon a level with the parson's desk itself."—This hardship the parson

com-

complained of loudly, and told *John*, one day after prayers, " he could bear it no longer—and would have it altered, and brought down as it should be."

John made no other reply, but " that the desk was not of his raising: —that 'twas not one hair breadth higher than he found it—and that as he found it so he would leave it.—In short, he would neither make an encroachment, neither would he suffer one."—The * *late* parson might have his virtues, but the leading part of his character was not *humility*—so that *John's* stiffness in this

* Abp H—rr—g.

H

point

point was not likely to reconcile matters.—This was *Trim's* harvest.

After a friendly hint to *John* to stand his ground, away hies *Trim* to make his market at the vicarage.—What passed there I will not say, intending not to be uncharitable; so shall content myself with only guessing at it from the sudden change that appeared in *Trim's* dress for the better—for he had left his old ragged coat, hat, and wig, in the stable, and was come forth strutting across the church-yard, yclad in a good charitable cast coat, large hat, and wig, which the parson had just given him.—Ho! ho! hollo! *John*,

cries *Trim*, in an insolent bravo, as loud as ever he could bawl — see here, my lad, how fine I am. — The more shame for you, answered *John* seriously — Do you think, *Trim*, says he, such finery, gained by such services, becomes you, or can wear well? — Fy upon it, *Trim*, I could not have expected this from you, considering what friendship you pretended, and how kind I have ever been to you — how many shillings, and sixpences, I have generously lent you in your distresses. — Nay, it was but the other day that I promised you these black plush breeches I have on. — Rot your

H 2 breeches,

breeches, quoth *Trim*: (for *Trim's* brain was half turn'd with his new finery) rot your breeches, says he — I would not take them up were they laid at my door — give them, and be d——d to you, to whom you like — I would have you to know I can have a better pair of the parson's any day in the week. — *John* told him plainly, as his word had once passed him, he had a spirit above taking advantage of his insolence in giving them away to another — but, to tell him his mind freely, he thought he had got so many favours of that kind, and was so likely to get many more for the same services, of the parson,

son, that he had better give up the breeches, with good nature, to some one who would be more thankful for them.

Here *John* mentioned * *Mark Slen-der* (who it seems the day before had asked *John* for them) not knowing they were under promise to *Trim*—
 “Come, *Trim*, says he, let poor *Mark* have them—you know he has not a pair to his a—, besides, you see he is just of my size, and they will fit to a T, whereas if I give ’em to you, look ye, they are not worth much, and be-

* Dr. Braith—t.

fides, you could not get your backside into them, if you had them, without tearing them all to pieces."—Every tittle of this was most undoubtedly true, for *Trim*, you must know, by foul feeding, and playing the good-fellow at the parson's, was grown somewhat gross about the lower parts, if *not bigger*; so that, as all *John* said upon the occasion was fact, *Trim* with much ado, and after a hundred hums and hahs, at last, out of mere compassion to *Mark*, *signs, seals, and delivers up ALL RIGHT, INTEREST, AND PRETENSIONS WHATSOEVER, IN, AND TO THE SAID BREECHES, THEREBY*

BIND-

BINDING HIS HEIRS, EXECUTORS, ADMINISTRATORS AND ASSIGNS, NEVER MORE TO CALL THE SAID CLAIM IN QUESTION.—All this renunciation was set forth, in an ample manner, to be in pure pity to *Mark's* nakedness—but the secret was, *Trim* had an eye to, and firmly expected, in his own mind the great green pulpit-cloth, and old velvet cushion, which were that very year to be taken down—which, by the by, could he have wheedled *John* a second time, as he had hoped, would have made up the loss of the breeches seven fold.

H 4

Now,

Now, you must know, this pulpit-cloth and cushion were not in *John's* gift, but in the church-wardens, &c. However, as I said above, that *John* was a leading man in the parish, *Trim* knew he could help him to 'em if he would—but *John* had got a surfeit of him—so, when the pulpit-cloth, &c. were taken down, they were immediately given (*John* having a great say in it) to * *William Doe*, who understood very well what use to make of them.

As for the old breeches, poor *Mark* lived to wear them but a short time,

* Mr. Birdm—e.

and

and they got into the possession of
 * *Lorry Slim*, an unlucky wight, by
 whom they are still worn—in truth, as
 you will guess, they are very thin by
 this time.

But *Lorry* has a light heart, and
 what recommends them to him is this,
 that, as thin as they are, he knows
 that *Trim*, let him say what he will to
 the contrary, still envies the *possessor*
 of them, and with all his pride would
 be very glad to wear them after *him*.

Upon this footing have these affairs
 slept quietly for near ten years—and
 would have slept for ever, but for the

* Lawrence Sterne.

un-

unlucky kicking bout, which, as I said, has ripped this squabble up afresh; so that it was no longer ago than last week, that *Trim* met and insulted *John* in the public town-way before a hundred people—tax'd him with the promise of the old cast pair of black breeches, notwithstanding *Trim's* solemn renunciation—twitted him with the pulpit-cloth and velvet-cushion—as good as told him he was ignorant of the common duties of his clerkship; adding, very insolently, that he knew not so much as to give out a common psalm in tune.

John

John contented himself by giving a plain answer to every article that *Trim* had laid to his charge, and appealed to his neighbours who remembered the whole affair — and, as he knew there was never any thing to be got by wrestling with a chimney-sweeper, he was going to take his leave of *Trim* for ever. But hold — the mob by this time had got round them, and their high mightinesses insisted upon having *Trim* tried upon the spot. —

Trim was accordingly tried, and, after a full hearing, was convicted a second time, and handled more roughly

ly by one or more of them than even at the parson's.——

Trim, says one, are you not ashamed of yourself to make all this rout and disturbance in the town, and set neighbours together by the ears, about an old—worn—out—pair of cast—breeches not worth half a crown? Is there a cast coat, or a place in the whole town, that will bring you in a shilling, but what you have snapped up like a greedy hound as you are.——

In the first place, are you not sexton and dog-whipper, worth three pounds a year? Then you begged the church-

church-wardens to let your wife have the washing and darning of the church-linen, which brings you in thirteen shillings and fourpence; then you have six shillings and eightpence for oiling and winding up the clock, both paid you at Easter — the pounder's place, which is worth forty shillings a year, you have got that too — you are the bailiff, which the late parson got you, which brings you in forty shillings more.

Besides all this, you have six pounds a year, paid you quarterly, for being mole-catcher to the parish. Aye, says the luckless wight above-mentioned
(who

(who was standing close by him with the plush breeches on) “you are not only mole-catcher, *Trim*, but you catch *STRAY CONIES* too in the *dark*, and you pretend a licence for it, which, I trow, will be looked into at the next quarter sessions.” I maintain it, I have a licence, says *Trim*, blushing as red as scarlet — I have a licence, and, as I farm a warren in the next parish, I will catch conies every hour of the night. *You catch conies!* says a toothless old woman just passing by.

This set the mob a laughing, and sent every man home in perfect good humour,

[III]

humour, except *Trim*, who waddled very slowly off with that kind of inflexible gravity only to be equalled by one animal in the creation, and surpassed by none.

I am,

Sir, yours, &c. &c.

P O S T S C R I P T.

I Have broke open my letter to inform you, that I missed the opportunity of sending it by the messenger, who I expected would have called upon me in his return through this village to York; so it has lain
a week

a week or ten days by me — I am not sorry for the disappointment, because something has since happened, in continuation of this affair, which I am thereby enabled to transmit to you all under one trouble.

When I finished the above account, I thought (as did every soul in the parish) *Trim* had met with so thorough a rebuff from *John* the parish clerk, and the town's folks, who all took against him, that *Trim* would be glad to be quiet, and let the matter rest.

But, it seems, it is not half an hour ago since *Trim* sallied forth again, and, having borrowed a fow-
gelder's

gelder's horn, with hard blowing he got the whole town round him, and endeavoured to raise a disturbance, and fight the whole battle over again — alleged that he had been used in the last fray worse than a dog, not by *John* the parish clerk, for I should not, quoth *Trim*, have valued him a rush single-hands — but all the town sided with him, and twelve men in buckram set upon me, all at once, and kept me in play at sword's point for three hours together.

Besides, quoth *Trim*, there were two misbegotten knaves in *Kendal green*, who lay all the while in ambush in *John's* own house, and they all sixteen came upon my back, and let drive at

me all together—a plague, says *Trim*, of all cowards.

Trim repeated this story above a dozen times, which made some of the neighbours pity him, thinking the poor fellow cracked-brained, and that he actually believed what he said.

After this *Trim* dropped the affair of the breeches, and began afresh dispute about the reading-desk, which I told you had occasioned some small dispute between the *late* parson and *John* some years ago.—This reading-desk, as you will observe, was but an episode wove into the main story by the bye, for the main affair was *the battle of the breeches and the great coat*.

How-

However, *Trim* being at last driven out of these two citadels—he has seized hold, in his retreat, of this reading-desk, with a view, as it seems, to take shelter behind it.

I cannot say but the man has fought it out obstinately enough, and, had his cause been good, I should have really pitied him. For, when he was driven out of the *great watch-coat*, you see he did not run away ; no—he retreated behind the breeches ; and, when he could make nothing of it behind the breeches, he got behind the reading-desk. To what other hold *Trim* will next retreat, the politicians of this village are not agreed. Some think his next move will be towards the rear of

the parson's boot; but, as it is thought he cannot make a long stand there, others are of opinion, that *Trim* will once more in his life get hold of the parson's horse, and charge upon him, or perhaps behind him: but, as the horse is not easy to be caught, the more general opinion is, that, when he is driven out of the reading-desk, he will make his last retreat in such a manner, as, if possible, to gain the *closetool*, and defend himself behind it to the very last drop.

If *Trim* should make this movement, by my advice he should be left, beside his citadel, in full possession of the field of battle, where 'tis certain he will keep every body a league off,
and

and may hop by himself till he is weary. Besides, as *Trim* seems bent upon *purging* himself, and may have abundance of foul humours to work off, I think he cannot be better placed.

But this is all matter of speculation—Let me carry you back to matter of fact, and tell you what kind of stand *Trim* has actually made behind the said desk: “Neighbours and townsmen all, I will be sworn before my lord mayor, that *John* and his nineteen men in *buckram* have abused me worse than a dog; for they told you that I play’d fast and go loose with the late parson and him in that old dispute of theirs about the *reading-desk*, and

and that I made matters worse between them and not better."

Of this charge *Trim* declared he was as innocent as the child that was unborn—that he would be book-sworn he had no hand in it.

He produced a strong witness, and moreover insinuated, that *John* himself, instead of being angry for what he had done in it, had actually thanked him—Aye, *Trim*, says the wight in the plush-breeches, but that was, *Trim*, the day before *John* found thee out. Besides, *Trim*, there is nothing in that, for the very year that you was made town's pounder, thou knowest well that I both thanked thee myself,

and moreover gave thee a good warm supper for turning *John Lund's* cows and horses out of my hard corn close, which if thou hadst not done, (as thou toldst me) I should have lost my whole crop; whereas *John Lund* and *Thomas Patt*, who are both here to testify, and are both willing to take their oaths on't, that thou thyself was the very man who set the gate open — and after all, it was not thee, *Trim*, 'twas the blacksmith's poor lad who turned them out—so that a man may be thanked and rewarded too for a good turn which he never did, nor ever did intend.

Trim could not sustain this unexpected stroke — so *Trim* marched off
the

the field without colours flying, nor his horn sounding, or any other ensigns of honour whatever.—Whether after this *Trim* intends to rally a second time—or whether he may not take it into his head to claim the victory—none but *Trim* himself can inform you.

However, the general opinion upon the whole is this, that, in three several pitch'd battles, *Trim* has been so trimm'd as, never disastrous hero, was trimm'd before.

F I N I S.

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